

REPORT

(3)

ON THE

35TH SECTION

OF THE

PUBLIC HEALTH ACT, 1866.

BY

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PUBLIC OFFICES, 2, CORNWALLIS STREET,

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH'S DEPARTMENT,

*Liverpool 16th August, 1866.*

29TH AND 30TH VICTORIA, CAP. 30, SECTION 35.

The Medical Officer of Health begs to report to the Health Committee that, by the 35th section of "The Public Health Act," it is required that application be made to one of Her Majesty's principal Secretaries of State, by the nuisance authority of the borough, in order that the Secretary of State may, by notice to be published in the *London Gazette*, declare that enactment which refers to the registration and regulation of sublet houses to be in force within the district of the said nuisance authority.

After that formality has been complied with, the Medical Officer of Health purposes, with the consent of the Health Committee, to commence the application of the enactment in those streets, the houses of which have already been found by the Inspectors to be continually overcrowded, viz. :—Cavendish Street, Milton Street, Sawney Pope Street, Addison Street, and Hodson Street. He will add to the list, from time to time, the houses in other streets which have been or shall be found overcrowded.

As the practical working of the enactment is new and so far experimental, it will, in his opinion, be prudent at first to make its application restrictive and tentative, and therefore he will work both the registration and inspection with the present staff attached to his office. The regulations for which he will have to ask the authority of the Health Committee and the Council are as follows :—

1st. Whenever it shall appear to the Medical Officer of Health desirable that certain houses, let in lodgings or occupied by members of more than one family, should be placed under the regulations made by the Council for the well ordering of the said houses, in accordance with the provisions of the Sanitary Act, 1866, he shall notify the same by printed circular to the owners or tenants of such houses, and shall keep in a book for that purpose, a register of all such houses, with the cubical measurement of the several rooms of each house.

2nd. The Medical Officer of Health shall cause to be forwarded to the chief or landlord's tenant of each house a printed ticket, stating the number of persons allowed to sleep in each room of such house.

The principle which is to direct this allotment of residents in rooms will be as follows :—Whenever there is in a house a separate sitting room, not occupied as a sleeping apartment during the night, the number of persons allotted to the sleeping rooms of such houses shall be fixed on a basis of 300 cubical feet for each adult, whenever all the rooms in a house are used as sleeping apartments, the number of persons who may occupy such rooms shall be fixed on a basis of 350 cubical feet for each adult.

3rd. The Medical Officer of Health shall cause to be forwarded to the chief or landlord's tenant of each house, on the registration of such house, a printed circular, containing the following regulations to be observed by the tenants of such house, viz. :

The landlord's tenant shall cause the floor of each and every room of such house to be well and sufficiently swept at least once in each day, before the hour of 12 o'clock noon ; and shall cause the windows of each and every sleeping room

in such houses to be and continue open to the full width thereof for one hour, morning and evening, unless prevented by tempestuous weather, or the illness of any inmates of such room; and shall cause the floors of all inhabited rooms in such houses to be washed at least once a week.

The owner or agent shall cause the walls and ceilings of every room in such houses to be well and sufficiently cleansed and limewashed, at least twice in every year; and whenever it shall appear that he has complied with the above regulation, and the house is nevertheless in a filthy condition, then the chief tenant shall cause the walls and ceilings to be well and sufficiently limewashed. The enforcement of the above regulations shall be provided for by penalties not exceeding forty shillings, for any one offence, with an additional penalty not exceeding twenty shillings for every day during which a default in obeying such regulations may continue.

If the Council authorize the above regulations, they will have to be confirmed by the Secretary of State before being put in force.

The Medical Officer of Health begs to assure the Committee that he will use his best endeavours to give practical efficiency to the provisions of this enactment; but experience has with him long since dispelled the hopeful illusion, that mere statutable laws, however stringent or honestly enforced, or mere sanitary inspections, however regular or continuous, will be able by themselves to check the evils of overcrowding in this large community. He may, therefore, at the commencement of putting into operation a new and experimental system of legislation, be allowed to reiterate opinions formerly enunciated; firstly, that all efforts of the Council and its Officers to check overcrowding, and regulate the sanitary condition of sublet houses, will be a failure, unless systematically and

loyally sustained by the co-operation of the owners and agents of such property ; secondly, that as the overcrowding of houses in any locality is a permanent menace and danger to the public health, so it is the duty of the public not to rest content with passive criticism of the efforts of the Council to reform the hygienic condition of the people ; but by combined and individual exertions, and at some risk of capital, to increase the house accommodation so urgently required by the working classes of the town.

Especially he would appeal in this matter to the generous and wealthy philanthropists, to whom Liverpool is largely indebted for many noble works—its drinking fountains, its playgrounds and gymnasiums, its trained nurses, its schools, churches, and those institutions of exalted and catholic beneficence where it is the high privilege of medical science to aid humanity in the mitigation of disease. Nothing is more patent to his mind than that neither law nor lecturing will be able, successfully, to cope with the moral and physical evils of overcrowding ; and that the best and most effectual remedy will be found in providing better houses for the labouring classes, and thereby carrying into their midst the practical teaching by example. There exists in London a society for improving the condition of the labouring classes, of which the estimable Lord Shaftesbury is the chairman of the committee of management. In a former report on the lodging houses of the metropolis, the Medical Officer endeavoured, very inadequately, to describe some of the many successes of this society ; but there is one feature in its constitution which might with much advantage find a response in Liverpool. The society assists, by the experienced advice of its members, in the formation of county, parochial, and district associations, and corresponds with clergymen and others disposed to co-operate in their respective



localities in the formation of such associations for improving the dwellings of the poor. Now as Christian associations, or church and chapel congregations, under the teaching of ministers of religion, exist in all towns, and in none more happily united in good works than in this, it seems not unreasonable to believe that here we have a natural and ready formed machinery to this desirable end. Already such associations have their clergy, their schoolmasters, their district visitors, their Doreas and sick clubs working systematically together in charity and religious teaching among the poor, and it will be only an extension of true missionary labour to promote, according to their wealth, the objects contemplated by the London society for improving the condition of the labouring classes. Liverpool presents a peculiarly appropriate field for such labour. It would not be difficult to obtain for purchase or long lease, on easy terms, very many bad courts, admirably suited for the same experiment of renovation that was carried out in Wild Court and Tyndall's Buildings in London—the former of which now yields £5 12s per cent. per annum on the total investment. Such renovated courts, under the wholesome moral discipline of a clergyman and his lay assistants, would be oases in the moral desert, and their example would in time tell for good on the surrounding neighbourhood. They would have this further advantage; ladies could there visit the poor without danger of receiving offence, and without any shock to their modesty and sensibility; for the rules of the society require the resident superintendent to keep a list of all the members of the families, to insist on home cleanliness, on ventilation of apartments, and on the absence of overcrowding and its abominable concomitants. If it were not out of place I could dwell more at large on this subject. I could picture every church and chapel with its social missionary district, small or large according to the subscrip-

tions or offerings of its members, with its model cottages, its improved model lodging houses, its wash houses, and its reading room for social and intellectual improvement, Even while I write I feel that many will regard the scheme as utterly Utopian ; but we have before us this pregnant fact—Liverpool is surpassingly rich, and Liverpool's death rate this week is 53 in the 1000, and the great primary cause of the sickness of Liverpool is the overcrowded and squalid condition of the homes of its working classes.

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MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH.